

Subject: Public School Funding Update and a Call to Action

Dear Bristol School Families,

With the topic of school funding in the news these recent months, members of the Bristol School Board wanted to provide clarity and begin a constructive conversation with our parents and community about Bristol School's financial position as it relates to general state aid and special education costs. **Just recently, it was announced that Bristol School will receive \$124,000 less than we were anticipating for this school year!** Read on for further details and ways you can help advocate for our students.

### How School Funding Works

Wisconsin public schools are funded through a combination of federal and state aid, along with local property tax revenue. For further detail [visit State Federal Aid and Grant Programs/Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.](#)

When state funding does not keep pace with required costs, school districts are legally required to make up the difference through the local property tax levy. Districts do not have the option to reduce or ignore services that are mandated by federal and state law.

### DECREASED GENERAL STATE AID FOR BRISTOL SCHOOL

In October 2025, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) communicated to districts an update to the General School Aids for 2025–2026 School Year. State aids are determined by a complex Equalization Formula. To read further visit [News: DPI Releases Figures in 2025–26 General School Aids](#)

- General state aid for Bristol School is approximately **\$443,884 less** for 2025–2026 compared to the prior year. **This represents approximately a 15% reduction** rather than an increase to offset inflation, staffing costs, or operational growth. This decrease was communicated to the district four months into our fiscal year.

### UNPREDICTABLE SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

At the beginning of the 2025–2026 school year, districts were informed that state funding for Special Education would provide greater stability and meaningful progress toward addressing long-standing funding gaps, particularly in Special Education. In the recent past, public-school districts have been reimbursed by the state for approximately **33 cents on the dollar**.

The actual funding picture is as follows:

- A much-needed increase to Special Education reimbursement was promised in this current biennial budget. This was very welcome news for our district as we currently **transfer approximately one million dollars annually from our general budget to our Special Education budget**. The biennial budget communicated an increase to approximately 42 percent of eligible costs for 2025–2026, and then 45 percent of eligibility for the year following.
- In December (six months into our fiscal budget), DPI communicated that the projected 42 percent level **would not be achieved**, and instead we should plan for approximately **35% reimbursement** of actual Special Education costs.
- Why the drastic change? Special education funding is setup as a limited amount; public schools do not receive “guaranteed” reimbursement known as “sum sufficient.”
- This leaves Bristol School with a surprise reimbursement gap of roughly **7%**, or approximately **\$124,000 less than anticipated** in our current budget.

### **The Impact on Bristol and Local Taxpayers**

Yes, Special Education services are a requirement for all eligible students, but meeting students’ needs is also at the core of Bristol School and something we take pride in as a district. When the state does not fully fund these obligations, the remaining cost must be absorbed by our local budget and puts further pressure on resources.

No amount of local budgeting discipline or projections can fully offset these structural funding gaps.

### **Call to Action**

We ask Bristol families and community members to consider joining the Bristol School Board by contacting their state legislators. **These changes would significantly improve both the short-term and long-term financial stability of Bristol School.**

These changes include:

- Delivery of the Special Education funding levels as they were communicated in the approved biennial budget for this school year and next
- This means Special Education reimbursement should be “sum sufficient” **meaning eligible costs are fully reimbursed rather than capped, allowing districts to budget with clarity and predictability**

- This may require stand-alone legislation that makes this change permanent and predictable for public schools

**We encourage respectful engagement with our locally elected representatives:**

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/legislators/assembly/2854> Representative Amanda Nedweski

- <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/21/wanggaard/> Senator Chris Van Wanngard

### **Our Commitment**

The Bristol School Board remains committed to transparency, responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars, and advocating for students and families when state funding decisions impact on our community.

Please reach out with questions as we hope to engage in this work together.

And as always, **Go Renegades!**

The Bristol School Board of Education